

## Expensive votes for sale this Christmas but still no room at the inn?



Editorial:

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During the Christmas season and on the cusp of what seems to have the potential to be an *annus horribilis* in 2025 news is being generated (like the carol 'We three Kings' "Westward leading, still proceeding") from the United States.

We learn that an unelected billionaire sidekick to the incoming/returning American President is extending his reach even unto the United Kingdom. The Reform Party a recent right-wing arrival on the British electoral scene, which specialises (like most far right parties) in agitating about immigration has apparently been offered a huge sum of money to support its electoral endeavours.<sup>i</sup> Should this come about by one means or another it would seriously distort British politics and represent both foreign interference and the purchase of voting intentions. It should be noted in this respect that the precursor to the Reform Party was the Brexit Party whose eager embrace of the mantra "Take Back Control" that assisted in the disastrous exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union has reversed position by effectively being willing to cede control to the United States!

Of course 2025 is likely to continue in a similar vein, namely foreign interference in nation states such as represented by Ukraine and brutal military engagement in Gaza, and Lebanon, with associated uncertainties in the new-look Syria. This isn't counting quite a number of other ongoing examples of warring and oppression.

Apart from the already immense cost in human lives and existences a sea-change now seems inevitable, even in Western democracies where voter preference is moving inexorably in a rightward direction, driven by powerful forces and a lot of money.

Often relegated to the sidelines in the Christmas story as variously narrated by the two Gospel accounts in Luke and Matthew, there is that of the flight to Egypt.<sup>ii</sup> This places the Holy Family firmly in the refugee and migrant camp. The story is told in order to validate Hosea 11 v1 'and out of Egypt I called my son' but it has a distinctly contemporary ring about it.

The account places concerned Christians in a difficult situation. Our birth narratives for Jesus must cause us to wonder what the Christian response to ever-increasing migrant numbers should be?

One of the most generous acceptances of migrants from war-torn Syria took place in Germany where over million Syrians displaced by the Assad regime were welcomed in the Merkel era. However now tensions are rising.<sup>iii</sup> The AFD *Alternative für Deutschland* German far-right populist party has emerged greatly strengthened like the French National Rally *Rassemblement national*. Together with numerous like-minded political parties over Europe they threaten to destabilise the current status and to move it in an unpredictable direction.

Most politicians are at a loss what to do. Much tinkering around with schemes of repatriation and promises to lower migrant levels have been singularly unsuccessful not least as falling indigenous population levels often demand imported work forces, skilled and unskilled.

It would be preposterous for this editorial to suggest a workable solution, except to observe that the troika of climate change, which is rendering large areas of the earth uninhabitable, imperialistic ambitions by autocratic leaders and religious fanaticism are indisputably drivers of instability and movements of people. These three are addressable and solvable but not in the short term and not without the co-operation and political wisdom that are in such short supply. Perhaps we are doomed then to descend into a fractious and violent anarchy?

A world dominated by powerful monied forces underpinned by populism but inevitably ruled by fists of iron takes us back to where we started, biblical Bethlehem with poverty, massacre and tyranny. Strangely, this was the seed bed for what we now call the Church, which despite its distinctly chequered history has overall been instrumental as a force for good.

Of course at the moment, at least in the case of the Church of England, we are hamstrung and confused with other preoccupations. These are epitomised by the Children's Society's<sup>iv</sup> rejection of the resigned and outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury's Christmas donation<sup>v</sup> ... a mixed-message that will raise as many questions, supporters and opponents as can be conjured up by an increasingly hostile press, social media and bewildered populace.

Nicholas Henderson  
Christmas 2024

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/dec/21/could-100m-of-elon-musks-money-sway-a-general-election-for-reform-uk>

<sup>ii</sup> The flight into Egypt is a story recounted in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:13–23). Soon after the visit by the Magi, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus since King Herod would seek the child to kill him.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy7kxn6p878o>

<sup>iv</sup> In 1893 the Society took the name Church of England Incorporated Society for Providing Homes for Waifs and Strays in 1893. In 1946, the title was changed to the Church of England Children's Society and it adopted the informal title of The Children's Society in 1982.

<sup>v</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/childrens-charity-rejects-christmas-donation-from-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-13277252>